

**Virginia Cave Board
Saturday, April 18, 2009
Endless Caverns, New Market, Virginia**

FINAL MINUTES

Virginia Cave Board Members Present

Mr. Tom Lera, Chairman
Dr. David C. Culver
Dr. Daniel H. Doctor
Ms. Babs Funkhouser
Mr. Andrew Harrison, PG
Dr. John R. Holsinger
Ms. Barbara L. Moss
Ms. Judy Molnar
Mr. David Socky
Ms. Meredith Weberg
Mr. Roger Kirchen, Virginia Department of Historical Resources representative

Virginia Cave Board Members Not Present

Mr. Jesse J. Richardson

DCR Staff Present

Mr. Joey Fagan
Mr. Larry Smith
Mr. Wil Orndorff

Others Present

Ms. Sumalee Hoskin, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Mr. Gary Moss

Call to Order

Mr. Tom Lera called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. and declared a quorum present.

Introduction and Announcements

Mr. Lera welcomed members of the Cave Board, DCR staff, and guests.

Approval of Minutes from January 10, 2009

MOTION: Dr. David Culver moved that the minutes of the January 10, 2009 meeting of the Virginia Cave Board be approved as corrected.

SECOND: Ms. Barbara Moss seconded.

DISCUSSION: None.

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

Treasury Report

Mr. Larry Smith reported that at the time of this meeting, the Cave Board Treasury contains a balance of \$3125.00. The cost to publish and distribute the current April 2009 issue of the Virginia Cave Owners Newsletter is \$936.00. After paying these expenses, the Cave Board treasury will contain \$2189, to be used for paying future newsletter printing and distribution costs.

Old Business

Education and Outreach Committee

Ms. Meredith Weberg discussed Virginia Cave Week, which is to be observed April 19 through 25, 2009, in conjunction with the week of Earth Day. A public service announcement/press release was prepared and circulated to various news media outlets to better present cave week to a wider audience. The purpose of Cave Week is to educate students and citizens about caves and karst in Virginia.

Ms. Weberg discussed the proposal for a special issue of the *Cave Owners' Newsletter* presenting information on White Nose Syndrome (WNS) in bats which will be printed and mailed in June. Ms. Weberg expressed frustration with the time required for publication of the newsletter. DCR staff indicated they would make an effort facilitate the requisite pre-publication approvals and expedite the purchasing process in order to shorten the time it takes to print and distribute the *Cave Owners' Newsletter*.

Ms. Babs Funkhouser announced that Crystal Caverns has a grant application pending for 12 permanent Civil War/ Karst Trail markers for the newly designed "Strata Shaped Strategy" interpretive trail at Crystal Caverns at Hupp's Hill Historic Park. The project could serve as the first component of the Virginia Karst Trail. Markers will illustrate how the geology of the Hupp's Hill area influenced historic events during the Civil War. Caver volunteers are encouraged to help with the project. Conservation projects, such as the one at Crystal Caverns, are an excellent way for cavers to remain active in cave-related projects while observing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) requested voluntary moratorium on caving. Mr. Smith noted that the DCR Division of Planning and Recreation Resources offers technical assistance and possible future funding through the Recreational Trails Fund Program for projects such as the one at Crystal Caverns.

Joint Technical Committee

Mr. Andrew Harrison reported that an assessment of archeological resources is required prior to the pending clean up of graffiti left by vandals in Rocky Hollow Cave.

Dr. Blaine Schubert, of East Tennessee State University, was issued a permit to perform paleontological work in a Smyth County cave.

Mr. Harrison reported that work by volunteers to place of the Virginia cave protection signs in cave entrances is progressing slowly. He noted that a second type of sign, in addition to the original cave protection signs, should be placed in Virginia caves in response to the recent discovery of White Nose Syndrome (WNS) in several caves. Mr. Wil Orndorff noted that three general types of WNS signs should be used. One type of sign would notify persons if a particular cave is closed and why, either because it contains bats known to be infected with WNS or because it contains a large number of bats that might be at risk because of WNS. A second type of sign would provide information about the requested USFWS voluntary moratorium on caving activity. A third type of sign would present information about required equipment decontamination procedures and suggest regionalization of any caving activities that might occur in spite of the requested voluntary USFWS moratorium.

The Board discussed WNS informational signs and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service voluntary moratorium on caving activity. Mr. Orndorff asked the Board and other interested parties to refer to the joint statement as issued April 15, 2009 and posted on the Virginia Cave Board website. The staff of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Natural Heritage Program and staff from the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries worked in consultation with members of the caving community to prepare the joint statement. The statement was prepared with the support of the Virginia Cave Board, the Virginia Speleological Survey, the Cave Conservancy of the Virginias, the executive committee of the Virginia Region of the National Speleological Society, and the Butler Cave Conservation Society (see related item latter in the meeting).

DCR Karst Program Report

Mr. Orndorff gave a brief summary on the recent work of the DCR Division of Natural Heritage Karst Program. In addition to the ongoing tasks reported at the previous Cave Board meeting, much of the recent work of the Karst Program has been devoted to WNS surveys and development of protocols.

Mr. Orndorff presented a written Karst Education report from Ms. Carol Zokaites to the Cave Board:

A project Underground Facilitators Training was held February 25-27, 2009. Nine new educators can now lead Project Underground workshops. The workshop was combined with a Project Wild workshop and was held at Douthat State Park. Seventeen Project Wild participants were trained in using the Project Underground materials.

Karst Education Day – Joey Fagan made a presentation to about 60 people at Luray Caverns at the event held on March 22, 2009.

Master Naturalists – Wil Orndorff gave a geology/karst presentation to 25 participants at Douthat State Park on February 26, 2009.

Christiansburg High School Environmental Day – Carol Zokaites staffed a karst exhibit on April 17, 2009.

Future plans include:

1. Chesapeake Bay Academy – Planning is under way for the 2009 Academy being held June 21-25, 2009.

2. The World Beneath Your Feet, a cooperative education project of the Allegheny Highlands Environmental Council:

(a) Joey Fagan will give presentations to the boards of supervisors of Allegany, Bath, and Highland Counties from May through August.

(b) Carol Zokaites will work with Jesse Richardson and Marek Smith to hold a Growing Communities on Karst event.

(c) Carol Zokaites will provide a Project Underground workshop for teachers from Bath County and surrounding areas.

3. 15th International Congress of Speleology (ICS), Kerrville, Texas – July 2009 – Carol Zokaites is chairing the day-long symposium: “Educating Citizens about Living in Karst.”

4. Virginia Resource Use Education Council (VRUEC) – Carol Zokaites serves as Vice-chair and DRC Representative:

(a) The Spring VRUEC meeting will be a joint event co-sponsored with the Virginia Science Education Leadership Association (VSELA) on Thursday, June 4, 2009. This will be an opportunity for the directors of Virginia natural resource and education agencies to hear the Virginia Naturally and Business Plan status reports and to unveil new materials available to educators.

(b) Fall meeting of the VRUEC will take place at the Jamestown 4-H Center on either Tuesday, September 8 or Wednesday, September 9, 2009. This meeting will be an environmental education conference.

Work on education materials for WNS will continue.

Karst Related Web Links

Several links to other karst-related websites are posted on the Cave Board website under Virginia Cave Week. Many links to websites containing resources on WNS are posted on the Cave Board webpage.

Field Meeting with EPA regarding improved sinkhole Class V injection wells

Mr. Orndorff reported that plans are being made to coordinate field visits to several unregistered sinkhole/injection well sites throughout Virginia's karst counties this summer. Participants would include staff from EPA and DCR as well as interested members of the Cave Board.

White Nose Syndrome Joint Statement

MOTION: Ms. Barbara Moss moved that the Virginia Cave Board formally endorse the Virginia joint statement regarding recommended measures to reduce the spread of White Nose Syndrome (WNS) as issued on April 15, 2009 and posted on the Virginia Cave Board website.

SECOND: Ms. Weberg seconded.

DISCUSSION: Questions were raised by members of the Board and there was a discussion regarding inconsistencies between the Virginia joint WNS statement and the moratorium on caving activities as requested by the USFWS. The Virginia joint WNS statement recommends strict decontamination procedures and that cavers in Virginia geographically isolate their caving activity and/or gear to defined caving areas in an effort to minimize the possible spread of WNS from cave to cave by cavers who choose not to observe the voluntary USFWS moratorium on caving.

Ms Sumalee Hoskin, a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, made a presentation on White Nose Syndrome in bats to the Cave Board. Ms. Hoskin presented many details about WNS in bats and explained that the USFWS is requesting cavers to observe all cave closures and advisories and to refrain from caving in WNS-affected states and adjoining states at any time until further notice. She explained that a moratorium was the most effective way to prevent any possible chance of transmission of WNS to cave-dwelling bats by cavers. Considerable discussion about WNS took place following the presentation.

VOTE:

In favor: Lera, Culver, Funkhouser, Kirchen, Harrison, Holsinger, Moss, Molnar, Socky, and Weberg.

Against: Doctor

Abstain: Harrison

Virginia Karst Trail

Ms. Funkhouser reported on the status of the Virginia Karst Trail earlier in the meeting as part of the Education Committee Report. Ms. Melton expressed a hope that, given their tradition of service for cave conservation related projects, many of the cavers who are temporarily curtailing their caving activities due to the USFWS moratorium might volunteer to help with cave or karst related conservation projects including helping to

construct portions of the Virginia Karst Trail. Mr. Lera noted that cavers have recently been active in performing sinkhole clean-out projects.

Land Conservation Update

Mr. Smith reported that in November 2008, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) purchased 250 acres of land along the Powell River in Lee County that supports Surgenors Cave. An additional purchase of 30 acres that supports Gallohan Cave #1 is being negotiated by TNC. The Surgenor-Gallohan Cave System is one of the most biologically diverse cave systems in Virginia. Both of these tracts will eventually be dedicated as part of the Virginia Natural Area Preserve System.

Arrangements are being made to acquire 26 additional acres for the Ogdens Cave Natural Area Preserve in Frederick County.

Negotiations are continuing to facilitate the purchase of 178 acres that will become a part of the Unthanks Cave Natural Area Preserve in Lee County.

A landowner in Highland County is considering placement of a conservation easement on a 700 acre tract of land that is reported to be near a significant bat cave. Mr. Rick Lambert of the Virginia Speleological Survey is looking into the status of the reported bat cave.

New Business

Show Cave Concern about WNS and Show Cave Update

Mr. Fagan reported on concerns expressed by the owner of Dixie Caverns regarding the impacts WNS might have on their operation. The role of show caves in educating the public about WNS was noted. Ms. Hoskin pointed out that the current USFWS moratorium statement does not apply to show caves. Dr. Doctor will prepare a draft statement addressing WNS issues in show caves to be reviewed by the Board.

Other New Business

Mr. Orndorff discussed a proposal for a Virginia and West Virginia WNS joint statement issued by the states' natural resource agencies. Such a statement would better facilitate dissemination of information about the geographic caving areas to promote regionalization of caving activity and to stem the spread of WNS by cavers.

Public Comment Period and Announcements

Dr. John Holsinger announced that the Virginia Museum of Natural History is hosting the Virginia Natural History Society's Symposium on "Historical Explorations into Virginia's Natural History" on September 26, 2009. The symposium will present the contributions of our leading naturalists over Virginia's 400 year history.

The 15th International Congress of Speleology will be held July 19 – 26, 2009 at Kerrville, Texas. (<http://www.ics2009.us>)

Dates for Future Cave Board Meetings

Meeting: August 15, 2009 at Grand Caverns at Grottoes, Virginia.

Thanks to Endless Caverns for Hosting Meeting

Mr. Lera expressed thanks on behalf of the Cave Board to the management and staff of Endless Caverns for hosting the meeting.

Adjournment

Mr. Lera adjourned the meeting at 3:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas Lera
Board Chairman

Joseph H. Fagan
Secretary